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ABSTRACT

Flexibility is a key term to emphasize when grouping students for instruction, since a student might be in a different group for one academic area as compared to another academic area. This paper describes grouping for different methods of reading instruction and other disciplines. The paper discusses the following: using basal readers, using library books for individualized reading, multi-age grouping, grouping in transition rooms, team teaching and grouping, the self-contained room, grouping in non-graded schools, open education procedures, and departmentalization. According to the paper, there are definite advantages for each plan of grouping students for instruction--thus (1) basal textbooks have a manual (which may be used flexibly) to provide suggestions for instruction; (2) individualized reading, developmentally, is based on students choosing what they like to read; (3) multi-age grouping might assist students to learn to work together with younger as well as older individuals; (4) transition rooms aid students to receive instruction which helps them to "catch up" with others in the same classroom; (5) team teaching emphasizes students working in whole class, small groups, and individual endeavors; (6) the self-contained classroom provides a plethora of opportunities to stress integration of subject matter; (7) the nongraded school emphasizes students achieving continuous progress; (8) open education stresses student achievement in decision making; and (9) departmentalization stresses teachers teaching in their area of subject matter specialization. Contains 13 references. (NKA)

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Grouping and Organizing for Instruction in Reading.

by Marlow Ediger

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GROUPING AND ORGANIZING FOR INSTRUCTION IN READING

There are a plethora of concerns involved when pupils are placed into groups for teaching and learning purposes. Each concern addresses a different problem. Pupils differ from each other in numerous ways. These differences include ability levels, interests possessed, purposes involved in learning, motivation and energy levels for achieving. The group a pupil is placed in should assist him/her to attain as optimally as possible. Perhaps, flexibility is a key term to emphasize when grouping pupils for instruction since a pupil might be in a different group for one academic area as compared to another due to strengths possessed (See Gunning, Chapter Eleven).

Grouping for Basal Reading Instruction

With the use of a basal textbook, the teacher needs to determine under which plan of grouping for instruction, the child will do best. The entire class may be taught together when the teacher introduces new words which pupils will encounter in the ensuing reading selection from the basal. The new words to be read need to be printed in neat, manuscript letters on the chalkboard. Each pupil should be able to see the words clearly. The teacher with pupils then may go over the identification and pronunciation of these words until mastery has occurred. Phonics or sound/symbol relations in the new words may be stressed as needed. Pupils also need to know the contextual meaning for each word as it is used in the text. Discussing the illustrations in the text assists pupils to further develop background information for reading from the ensuing content. Next, there should be questions which pupils might have raised by this time, or the teacher may identify selected questions. These questions can be answered by pupils when reading from the basal textbook. These followup activities might be quite varied. Pupils may wish to show comprehension in different ways such as

1. drawing one or more illustrations to reveal comprehension
2. three members in class developing a mural or collage to indicate what has been learned from reading
3. constructing an object, individually or collectively to show major ideas read
4. telling orally about main concepts read in the reading selection.
5. dramatizing collaboratively that which was acquired

through reading (Ediger and Rao, 2000, Chapter 22).

Generally, pupils are grouped heterogeneously when basal texts are used in teaching. However, there are teachers who divide the total group in the classroom into three subgroups based on ability. This would then be called homogenous grouping. Negative names should not be used to identify which group a pupil is in. Each pupil needs to be respected and accepted. The three groups may have different basal readers such as those being the most difficult to read, those of lesser difficulty, and the third group would have the easiest text to read. They may also be in different places within the basal. These texts are chosen based on the developmental level of each child. The new words are listed on the chalkboard for pupil viewing. Contextual meanings for each word are developed as they will be read in the textbook. The related illustrations in the text are discussed to build pupil background information for reading the ensuing subject matter. Questions will be raised by pupils and/or the teacher for which content being read might well supply needed answers. Pupils then read silently the subject matter contained in the story, after which a discussion should follow to extend and enrich learnings gained from reading in each of the three homogeneously grouped sets of pupils.

Heterogeneous versus homogeneously grouped pupils has long been an issue in education. The author takes the point of view that both can be emphasized depending upon needs of the involved pupils. The teacher needs to determine under which conditions do pupils achieve more optimally. Thus, in a follow up activity following reading and discussing of subject matter read, pupils may work on a related project, heterogeneously (mixed achievement levels) or homogeneously grouped based on ability.

Pupils reading from a basal text can be stressed in all academic areas and thus emphasize reading across the curriculum.

Advantages given for heterogeneous grouping are the following:

1. it is more true to relationships among people in society. In buying goods and services, then, the buyer deals with individuals from all socioeconomic and ability levels. This is true of visiting in an informal situation, also, in that persons tend to interact with others regardless of ability levels. Sometimes, too, one visits with people of similar abilities.
2. it is important to learn to appreciate pupils of diverse ability levels since life itself consists of working with people who

differ from each other in a plethora of ways.

Advantages given for homogeneous grouping are the following:

1. it is easier in planning to teach a uniform group of achievers instead of trying to teach a set of pupils where the range of achievement is great indeed.
2. it is true that pupils may challenge each other by being more uniform in achievement. It is feasible to have somewhat alike achievers motivate each other by example. Generally, with heterogeneously grouped pupils, the lowest member cannot possibly keep up and be challenged by top achieves (See, Lieu, 2000).

Reading from LIbrary Books

Instead of using the basal or together with basal textbook use in the curriculum, pupils might read library books. With the use of library books, individualized reading is being emphasized. Each pupil chooses a library book to read, based on his/her reading level and on the topic preferred. Thus, there needs to be available an adequate number of library books on different reading levels and on different topics to provide for individual differences. The pupil is the chooser. After completing the reading of a library book, the pupil may have a conference with the teacher to ascertain pupil comprehension and the quality of oral reading. The teacher may record observations made and compare earlier with later conferences to ascertain pupil achievement. When using individualized reading exclusively, there are no problems in grouping pupils for instruction. Each is reading a different library book based on his/her very own interest and achievement level.

In each academic area, library books may be read instead of reading from the basal text text. Thus, in a science/social studies unit of study such as "The Changing Surface of the Earth," each pupil may select a library book to read on that topic and join in on the discussion for each day's lesson. Related projects may be developed pertaining to that unit of study, either individually or collectively such as making a model volcano to understand the concept of "volcanic eruptions" more thoroughly. If a committee of pupils works collaboratively on a project, then either heterogeneous or homogeneous grouping may be stressed. The teacher needs to be skilled in using diverse kinds of grouping procedures. There should be opportunities for pupils to learn from each other in both heterogeneously grouped and homogeneously grouped

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learners. Whole group, small groups, and individual endeavors make it necessary for the teacher to think which kind of grouping, heterogeneously or homogeneously, should pupils experience to achieve as optimally as possible (See Moss and Hendershot, 2002).

In school and in society, individuals interact with those of similar reading ability levels as well as when a mixed achievement level of individuals is in the offing

Multi- age Grouping

Multi-grade grouping is practiced, generally, if a teacher teachers a combination room of third and fourth graders. Here, pupils may be grouped heterogeneously by teaching the third grades separately from the fourth graders. There will generally be a wide range of achievement in each grade. Thus, the third graders may achieve in reading from the first to the fifth grade, whereas the fourth graders may read from the second to the sixth grade levels in reading achievement.

There are combination room teachers who group pupils into three homogeneously grouped sets of learners. In the top reading group, there will be both third and fourth graders. This would be true, too, for the average, as well as slowest achievers.

Pupils may well vary from each other in terms of how well they achieve in each academic area. Thus, a pupil may be in the top group in reading, but somewhat toward the average in mathematics. Selected pupils may also achieve toward the top in all academic areas. Or a pupil may achieve at the lowest level in all academic disciplines. Judgments need to be made by the teacher in terms of how often to group homogeneously for reading instruction only, or for each of the different academic areas including mathematics and science. There could be many groups taught in this case. With heterogeneous grouping in combination rooms, third graders being taught separately from fourth graders will automatically tend to make for heterogeneous grouping as will be true for fourth graders being taught in a group (Ediger and Rao, 2001).

Pupils in Transition Rooms

In some schools where pupils do not do passing work for a specific grade level, a transition room of learners may be formed. Pupils then who have done failing work on a grade level may be passed on to the next grade level in order to stay with their peers. However, these pupils will be given extra assistance and

help to make up for identified deficiencies. It may be that a retired teacher can give this extra assistance on the next grade level. It could be that the transition room pupils receive tutoring before or after school. Peer teaching, when desirable, may be implemented to assist those deemed to lack needed knowledge and skills. Summer school is a good time, too, for transition pupils to receive needed assistance. Selected schools have even emphasized Saturday morning class time for those deemed insufficient in achievement. Might pupils then spend too much time in school work? The goal for transition room pupils is to catch up with what are considered to be realistic goals. In one school where the author supervised university student teachers, the board of education had adopted a ruling that pupils who did not complete classroom assignments would need to do so after school. Parents, then, would pick up their offspring after classroom work had been completed (Ediger, 1988, Chapter Eight).

Team Teaching and Grouping for Instruction

There are several plans of team teaching. However, most plans boil down to the following:

1. two or more teachers plan together to teach a given set of pupils. The team than cooperatively chooses the objectives, learning opportunities, and the assessment procedures.
2. the team has one teacher whose strengths are the greatest to teach a single lesson for large group instruction. The other teacher(s), take their turn teaching in large group instruction. They observe and help pupils stay on task during large group instruction.
3. smaller groups or committees follow with clarification of ideas and skills taught in large group instruction. Learnings are also extended, as well as taught in depth. Follow up instruction emphasizes diagnosis and remediation of pupil needs.
4. individual endeavors stress pupils doing something purposefully such as doing a project relating to the large or small group sessions.
5. team members evaluate pupil achievement in a conference setting in which each member has contributions to make in improving the curriculum for pupils individually (See Gordan).

Cooperation and harmony among team teaching members are vital for collaborative endeavors to function successfully. The team instead of individuals planning the curriculum makes

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for a new perspective in teaching. Members may well learn from each other in planning for instruction as well as when observing the quality of instruction from actual teaching. In large and small group instruction, pupils may be grouped heterogeneously or homogeneously when being taught by a teaching team. Advocates of team teaching stress that more than one mind is better than a single teacher in a self contained classroom (See Green and Petty).

The Self Contained Room

The self contained classroom has been a standby for many years as a way of grouping pupils for instruction. Here, a single teacher teaches almost all curriculum areas. The self contained classroom may experience pull outs of pupils by the remedial reading instructor as well as the special education teacher for selected specific areas of instruction. For example, the remedial reading instructor may need to teach a pupil one on one in the area of reading. The special education teacher may have one or more main streamed pupils taught in a small group for specific periods of time. The self contained classroom, too, might have special music, art, and/or physical education teachers to teach in their respective areas of specialization.

The self contained classroom has numerous advantages, over other plans of grouping for instruction, which include the following:

1. the teacher can get to know children well by teaching them for the majority of school time. This makes it possible for the self contained teacher to get to know each child well in terms of past achievement, as well as know each child developmentally; an improved curriculum might well result when using this information to plan lessons and units of study.
2. the teacher may again use previous plans of lesson/unit construction, if these worked well and provided for individual differences. Some modifications will need to result due to summative evaluation of these plans. The teacher may make notes on these plans as to changes which need to be made.
3. the teacher can generally be more effective in parent/teacher conferences when knowing the offspring's parents more thoroughly due to having taught the same children during the school year.
4. the teacher might provide for different patterns of grouping for instruction within the self contained classroom. Thus, the teacher can emphasize teaching the class as a whole, small group/committee work, as well as individual endeavors of

pupils when developing the curriculum. Highly flexible grouping plans may be used to encourage optimal learner achievement (See Burns and Schell).

Non-graded Schools

Pupils may be grouped in non-graded classrooms for the elementary school years. Thus starting with what is called, normally, the first grade level, pupils my be grouped homogeneously based on reading achievement. There has to be an adequate number of six year olds to group pupils homogeneously. Thus, if there were five roomfuls with 20 pupils per room, for example, a good chance would be there to secure a fairly homogeneous set of learners per room. The pupils in any room will always present differences in one way or another such as in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies, music, art, and physical education achievement. Interests, hobbies possessed, and motivation will provide for further differences.

With each roomful then of 20 pupils in homogeneous grouping, the teacher may further divide each roomful in terms of high, low, and average achievement in reading.

The teacher needs to place each child into the group he/she will do best in within the framework of homogeneous grouping. Fast achievers can complete more than one grade level in achievement in one school year. Thus, in the top roomful of the five given as examples, they may have completed second and third grade materials, and even beyond, at the end of the first year of schooling after kindergarten. Careful records need to be kept of each roomful of pupils as well as the subgroups therein. For the next school year, pupils begin with where they left off the previous school year. Thus, for example, if in the slowest achievement level of the five roomfuls of pupils, a subgroup is reading toward the middle of first grade reading materials, they would begin here at for the next school year. Pupils do not skip achievement levels nor do they advance beyond the level they can achieve in realistically, at the present time. Continuous progress from each pupil, regardless of the present reading level, is desired. Grade levels are merely mentioned to identify the past and present achievement level of the learner. Otherwise, there are no grade levels in the non-graded elementary school, but achievement levels are spoken of instead. With the example of five roomfuls of six year olds and three subgroups per classroom, can make for fifteen different reading levels. What is

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then emphasized in reading at the end of a school year provides a sequential beginning for the new school year (See Shane).

Open Education

Open education procedures, as the name indicates, provides choices of opportunities to learn such as a leaning centers approach in reading instruction. The teacher then needs to establish an adequate number of centers with each having enough tasks to make it possible for pupils individually to select what to read, as well as to omit what is not deemed to be purposeful. Each learning center should have a clear title pertaining to the kinds of library books thereon. The following are examples:

1. nature, the zoo and circus, as well as farm animals
2. people of other nations
3. historical, geographical, among other academic disciplines
4. classical books such as A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens. These writings may be simplified including Classics Illustrated such as Tom Sawyer as well as Huckleberry Finn
5. narrative content such as books by Dr. Suess
6. encyclopedias from several publishers
7. science library books including those on the changing surface of the earth, as well as library books on mathematics including the history of mathematics and the metric system.
8. different modes of transportation
9. inventions in society
10. space travel and missiles.

For each learning center, a task card should list about five tasks for pupils to do to show comprehension. For example in center number one, pupils may read a library book on nature. To indicate comprehension in reading about penguins, pupils might select a problem area such as how penguins can survive in the Antarctic. By going to the encyclopedia center, the pupil may find needed information therein (See Wolfe)..

Open education may or may not have open spaces. Thus, leaning centers psychology many stress having centers in the regular classroom as well as within open space architecture. Selected buildings which were built with open spaces have had walls built to separate the different classrooms. Open education must permit

1. pupil choice in ascertaining what to learn, with teacher assistance when necessary

2. pupils determining how to be evaluated after the completion of a task

3. pupils sequencing their choices in terms of which library books to read.

4. pupils may also choose their very own library books when sustained silent reading is being emphasized (SSR)

5. pupils reading library books pertaining to a unit of study being taught such as on "volcanos" relating to a science unit on the Changing Surface of the Earth.

There can be pupil/teacher planning of learning canters or the teacher may develop the different centers with enough tasks so that pupils may omit doing those which do not possess perceived purpose. Each center may be introduced by the teacher to secure learner interest and attention. Bulletin board displays may help to entice pupils having an inward desire to read selected library books. Not every library book can be introduced from the diverse centers, by any means. Each center, however, should be introduced and a library book held up from that center for all pupils to see. As the library book is held up, the testier may mention in a sentence or two what the contents are related to (See Doll).

Departmentalization

There are very few schools which have departmentalization on the primary grade levels, except for music, art, and physical education. More schools emphasize departmentalization on the intermediate grade levels. Here, there may be specially trained teachers, for example, to teach mathematics and science. Also, those teachers, not specially trained, who like and are very strong in science and mathematics instruction may then teach these academic areas while other intermediate grade teachers might tike to teach social studies and the language arts instead. The arguments for departmentalization of subject matter on the intermediate grade levels are the following:

1. subject matter is becoming increasingly complex to teach.

2. subject matter needs to be challenging for intermediate grade pupils and a well qualified teacher is needed to teach here, especially for gifted and talented pupils.

3. subject matter taught should be interesting to teachers. An enthusiastic teacher is needed for teaching intermediate grade pupils, as well as for all levels of instruction (See Victoria, 1993).

Teachers are then able to do advanced degree university course work in their chosen academic area of specialty. Integration of subject matter is still possible by planning together with other teachers who teach a different academic discipline.

In Closing

There are definite advantages for each plan of grouping pupils for instruction, as presented above. Thus

1. basal textbooks have a manual to provide suggestions for instruction. The manual may be used flexibly and teachers may incorporate their very own ideas, also, for teaching and learning situations in assisting pupils to achieve optimally.
2. individualized reading, developmentally, is based on pupils choosing what they like to read.
3. multi-age grouping might assist pupils to learn to work together with younger as well as older individuals. People in society interact with others of diverse age levels.
4. transition rooms aide pupils to receive instruction which helps them to "catch up" with others in the same classroom.
5. team teaching emphasizes pupils working with the class as a whole, small groups, and individual endeavors. In society, people work on these three levels when interacting with others.
6. the self contained classroom provides a plethora of opportunities for the teacher to stress integration of subject matter.
7. the nongraded school emphasizes pupils achieving continuous progress which all should do, regardless of the kinds of growing patterns which prevail.
8. open education stresses pupil achievement in decision making. Life itself consists of pupils making choices among alternatives.
9. departmentalization stresses teachers teaching in their area of subject matter specialization.

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